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Christianity and Public Culture in Africa

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article on Balinese dance performances for tourists is also missing from the review of work on dance.

Despite these *lacunae*, *Religion and Tourism* breaks new ground by insisting that scholars take the intersection between religion and tourism seriously, rather than simply “confirming prejudices” that depict tourism as superficial and a marginal topic for academic research (221). Stausberg rightly insists that “by being opened to and submerged in tourism, religious events, performances, places and things do not as such become degraded and inauthentic” (ibid). This book does valuable work in drawing scholarly attention to the ways in which tourism promotes inter-religious encounters and the communication of knowledge about religion as well as to the religious experiences that at least some tourists see as central to their travels.

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Christianity and Public Culture in Africa

HARRI ENGLUND, ed., 2011

Athens, OH: Ohio University Press

238 pp., US\$49.95 (hb), US\$20.95 (pb)

ISBN 978-0-8214-1945-8 (hb), ISBN 978-0-8214-2022-5 (pb)

The observation that contemporary religion is public and contradicts earlier predictions of its going private is by now well recognized. Can we expect anything new from yet another volume on the relationship between religion and public life and politics? Grown out of a conference held at the University of Cambridge in 2008, this collection of essays on the public role of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa is an answer to a dissatisfaction with approaches to religion and politics in Africa that tend to reinforce “Africa’s pathological exceptionalism” by focusing on spiritual concerns. Instead, the contributors to this volume show how African Christians have constituted domains and categories for critical thought and moral and political practice. By exploring a broad variety of activities through which Christians assume public presence,

engage in public debates, and establish identities, the authors avoid narrow definitions of formal politics and counter reductions of religion to belief and doctrinal position. The notion of public culture runs through the book as a trigger for detailed ethnographic and historical investigation of what actually assumes public significance, the means through which people make claims and identities public, and the ways in which new publics come into being. This way, “embodied, deeply felt experiences” and “deliberative and critical reason” are presented as coexisting rather than belonging to different domains.

Most of the chapters achieve these aims very well and offer insightful case studies and sophisticated analyses, although the book also contains some weaker chapters. The essays are grouped into three sections. In Part I, James Pritchett, Marja Hinfelaar, and Nicholas Kamau Goro explore “missionary and nationalist encounters” in rural settings and colonial and early post-colonial situations. Studying public culture in the rural past is a refreshing complement to current scholarship on mass media and the public sphere that tends to focus on contemporary urban settings and offers valuable insights into the historical legacies of Christian mission, colonialism, and nationalism for Christianity’s public role in contemporary Africa. In Part II, Barbara Cooper, Ruth Prince, and Damaris Parsitau focus on “patriarchy and public culture”, showing how Christians’ public activities and idioms re-negotiate the boundaries between the private and the public, as intimate matters of reproduction, gender relations, and health become matters of public concern. Part III, with chapters by Birgit Meyer, Harri Englund, Ilana van Wyk, and Michael Okyerefo, examines the “plurality of pentecostal publics”, offering critical reconsideration of generalising assumptions (academic and popular) about the public role of African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity.

Another strong aspect of the book is its broad view of the ‘media’ and mediating practices through which ‘public-ness’ is achieved, including rural missionaries’ mail and motor cycles, novels, Christian naming ceremonies, debates about widow inheritance and HIV/AIDS, evangelical radio shows, and the development projects of Pentecostal churches. At the same time, the wide range of topics which the essays cover makes one wonder whether public culture is not too broad a (container) concept. Although each chapter is interesting and relevant, the chapters also seem randomly chosen and lack strong internal coherence. More seriously perhaps, another danger of the notion of public culture, as Meyer points out in her contribution—which is more a programmatic outline for the study of public religion than a case study—is the possible confusion of a broad, empirical use of the term ‘public’ as openly accessible with a narrower use with specific normative connotations of secularity. While the book’s explicit approach is the former, as Englund sets out in his introduction, not all the chapters entirely escape this danger. Some authors (including Englund himself in his chapter on spiritual warfare) seem implicitly to measure the extent to which Christian public activity is rationally informed and socially engaged and promotes peace, civility, development, etc. This book does a good and important job in going beyond challenging the secularisation thesis by calling attention to the power of secularist ideals in shaping local debates and action in Africa. However, in their quest to correct stereotypes, especially with regard to Pentecostal and evangelical churches, some authors seem too hard-pressed to prove that these

churches take up their civic responsibilities in a way that “befits democracy”, as Englund puts it (184). Nevertheless, the collection as a whole makes for an insightful and stimulating read for scholars and students of African Christianity and anyone interested in the various ways in which African Christians shape public life.

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Cultivating Unity within the Biodiversity of God

ANNE PRIMAVESI, 2011

Salem, Oregon: Polebridge Press

v + 209 pp., US\$20.00, £17.50 (pb)

ISBN 978–1–59815–031–5

Anne Primavesi is perhaps mostly known for her books on Gaia (see *Sacred Gaia*, *Gaia's Gift*, *Gaia and Climate Change*), exploring earth–ethical–theological–holism and arguing for nature as a symbiotic, inter-connected, balanced pattern of reciprocal relations, or ‘gift events’, impelling responsibility and commitment (the original donor being God, nature’s Creator, who is, in this sense, participant in the evolutionary process, evolving in a world of relationships; this liberating God from hierarchy and transcendence and sacralising nature, seeing spirit in all of dynamic existence). Although nominally on the same subject, *Cultivating Unity* is slightly different: it explores a biblical exegesis to create a new way of looking at God, humanity, and nature—a critical look, from the bottom-up, challenging accepted ideas, embracing nature, rather than one from the top down, reinforcing the dominant *status quo*, dominating nature. Primavesi argues for such ideas by stressing the need for a new *koinonia* (communion/mutual unity), cultivating bottom-up diverse unity, rather than a *koinon* (imperial force/rule-based order), stressing a dominant, top-down singular culture. The former is seen as followers of Jesus in a loose confederation of communities, based on a diversity of ideas and experiences, grounded in Jesus (and a modern ecological equivalent of cultivating unity with diverse nature), while the latter is the Christianised Roman Empire and Catholic Church (and its modern equivalents and their ideas of God/human dominance), based on a singular culture, grounded in rules and official doctrine.

A new *koinonia*, one able to accept and reflect and create a diverse unity, accepting and valuing the inter-connected diversity of nature (including humanity and its diverse cultures) as part of God’s continuous, valued creation, is, for Primavesi, exemplified by the life and saying of Jesus; in particular, parables (with Jesus—His life—being the ultimate parable). Parables, in this sense, are critical stories, turning the accepted world and its mythic structures upside down, overturning structures of expectation (being paradoxical, disorienting; which is what elements of the Old Testament—e.g.